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Press Release

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HEALTH ADVISORY FOR NO 6 (BUNKER C) OIL

BELLE CHASSE, La. -- The U.S. Coast Guard, American Commercial Lines and the State of Louisiana, as part of the Unified Command for the DM 932 spill, is issuing the following health advisory:

Public exposure to oil via inhalation:

Inhalation hazard of volatile organic compounds (VOC) from weathered fuel oil in open spaces is not considered a human health hazard. Number 6 contains relatively low concentration of VOC when fresh. Days or weeks after the oil is spilled and exposed to air, the VOC concentration will typically be much below the level of concern. In all likelihood, VOC concentrations near highways or in cities is higher.

Public exposure to oil via skin contact:

Weathered fuel oil contains large petroleum compounds that have low vapor pressure (they do not evaporate readily). Skin contact with the oil should be avoided, and if it occurs the skin should be washed with soap and water, mineral oil, baby oil or any other safe and widely used cleaning method.

For most people brief skin contact with heavy fuel oil or tar balls would not be a problem. A small fraction of the population may be sensitive to oil and its products, and skin contact may cause skin problems, usually a skin rash.

Number 6 fuel oil (bunker C) is a dense, viscous oil. When spilled on water, the oil usually spreads into thick, dark colored slicks which can contain large amounts of oil. The heaviest Number 6 oils may break up into discrete patches and tarballs instead of forming slicks.

Public health concerns are routinely expressed during spills where the general public may come in contact with residues of the oil. If you come in contact with the oil, contact your personal physician for additional guidance.

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